

able types of humanity and that its workings have been greatly modified by social progress. In some respects it has doubtless been reduced in effectiveness; but I am convinced, even though no one else agrees with me, that in other ways it may be

working more vigorously than ever. A factor of great biological importance it will always remain, do what we may, and however bungling our efforts at eugenic reform may prove to be, it will always aid in the development of a better adjusted race.



THE ETHICS OF STERILIZATION

Two Letters Provoked by Recent Opinions

From the Reverend Father M'Nabb, O.P.

SIR,—As you do me the honour to reply to my quotation from St. Thomas Aquinas by giving another quotation from St. Thomas, perhaps you would do me the favour to add a further word to the discussion.

1. My quotation was eminently relevant, "No one should unjustly hurt another in order to further the common good."* Although this principle was appealed to in the matter of injustice through false accusation, yet it was a broad principle of justice which would be *à fortiori* applicable to the matter of 'sterilization.'

2. I must express my gratitude that you have printed verbatim the whole article of St. Thomas. Discussion tends to be more prolonged than profitable when the authorities are merely referred to or are given in fragments. Moreover, it is all to the good that the most fundamental matter of social justice should be discussed, as Aquinas always discusses such matters, in the calm atmosphere of ethical principles. But though a scholarly discussion on steri-

lization by an appeal to ethical principles would be valuable, I feel I have no right to ask your hospitality for such a favour. Yet I should be glad to point out that your appeal to St. Thomas in support of sterilization is not valid.

3. You will notice that St. Thomas does not once mention the word "sterilization," but the word "mutilation." The reason for his silence is that there is a wide difference between the two words. St. Thomas takes mutilation to mean the "removal of a member of the human body." Sterilization is the "removal of a procreative member or element of the human *in order to prevent procreation.*"

St. Thomas wrote the article in order to prove what some denied, that it was lawful to save life by cutting off a limb. The very first objection is directed against those—Christian scientists before our day!—who argued that all mutilation or, as we should say, all amputation was against nature and therefore against morality.

But it is quite clear that, though amputation is not in itself morally evil, amputation done under certain circumstances, and especially under the circumstance of *aim* or *purpose*, may be morally evil. Thus amputation against the will of the amputated would be morally evil. Or again, if a Catholic surgeon removed the editor's eyes in order to damage the EUGENICS

* *Summa Theologica*, Part II, IIae, Q. Iviii, Art. 3. In the same spirit St. Thomas, the Doctor Veritatis (Doctor of Truth), says: "It is not lawful to tell a lie in order to deliver another from any danger whatever" [*Ibid.*, Q. IIO. Art. 3].

REVIEW, it would be morally evil. As the ethical practitioners say: "An act morally indifferent in itself may be morally evil when clothed with circumstances, and especially with the circumstance of *aim* or *purpose*."

Now some words express not merely an act, such as mutilation or amputation, but also the mode or purpose of the act; as murder signifies not merely the taking away of life, but the taking away of life by one not authorised by public authority and for purposes not morally right. Murder is everywhere accounted wrong; yet it is merely complete mutilation done from a wrong motive.

Again "sterilization" like "murder" is a word signifying not merely an act, but also the *aim* or *purpose* of the act. Sterilization is not merely mutilation or amputation. Sterilization is mutilation or amputation of a procreative member—in order to prevent procreation.

Numbers of amateur moralists, not understanding these accuracies of scientific ethics, are heard to say that the Catholic Church allows 'sterilization' because, for example, it allows the removal of diseased ovaries. Such amateurs in the most difficult of all sciences have not realized the difference between removing ovaries *because they are diseased*, and removing ovaries *because, not being diseased, they might allow of procreation*.

Sterilization, then, is the removal of a procreative member [without destroying procreative sexual pleasure] in order to prevent procreation. It is this explicit *aim* or *purpose* of preventing procreation that is essential to sterilization as distinct from mutilation or amputation. Anyone who realizes this scientific truth will go on to realize that in the superbly accurate reasoning of St. Thomas there are arguments for the lawfulness of some, not all forms of mutilation or amputation. But there is not one argument in favour of sterilization as sterilization, i.e. as the deliberate mutilation of a procreative organ for the purpose of preventing procreation.

FR. VINCENT M'NABB, O.P.

From Cecil I. B. Voge, Ph.D., F.R.S.E.

Sir,—The quotation from Saint Thomas Aquinas on sterilization in your last number is of great interest and of no little value. In this connection the following passage from Thorek appears to be relevant:

"While Mohammedans resorted to castration of young males for practical reasons, Christians castrated their young for *Church idealism*. The well-known fact that the ablation of the sex glands does not permit of the full development of the voice has caused many parents to submit their sons to the operation of castration so that they may remain in the service of God by singing in various choirs. . . ."

Kankeleit states that about two thousand boys were castrated annually in the states governed by the Church; and Magnus Hirschfeld, in his *Naturgesetze der Liebe*, quotes, "La voix des castrates imite celle des cherubims au ciel." It was his experience, when in Rome, to be introduced to a number of castrated singers belonging to the famous choir of the Church of St. Peter. Professor Alessandro Morechi, one of the most noted singers of the Sistine Chapel choir, likewise underwent this operation in his youth.

That castration was performed for this purpose, or encouraged, by the Roman Church is not insisted on, but advantage was certainly taken of the results of such a procedure; and it is difficult to reconcile this attitude with that of that Church to-day towards sterilization.

The main difference between the castration of singers and the sterilization of aments, appears to lie in the fact that in the former an appeal to the senses is made, whereas in the latter there exists a weapon for the combating of congenital disease, unhappiness, and misery.

It is stated by some that sterilization may encourage the dissemination of venereal infection; but this, even if it be true, appears to be a reflection upon prophylactic